



Open-ended Working Group on Ageing
for the purpose of strengthening the protection of the human rights of older persons

2nd working session, 1-4 August 2011
Opening statement by the European Union

The EU welcomes the holding of the second meeting of the open-ended Working Group on Ageing and thanks the bureau and United Nations colleagues for the efforts that went into organizing it. The working sessions will allow us to benefit from insights of experts, as well as to further discuss steps that have been undertaken to improve the situation of the human rights of older persons and share good practices. All this will enhance our understanding of the situation of this large and growing sector of society, and to bring us closer to the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by older persons.

The EU actively participated in first meeting of the Working Group in April and welcomed the opportunity to exchange information, particularly on regional and national efforts in this area. We believe that the April session showed that a good number of standards and policy frameworks exist at the international, regional and national level.

At the same time, the meeting allowed us to deepen our awareness of issues that remain unaddressed, for a variety of reasons. We have embarked on a very interesting exchange on ways to address protection gaps, including the use of the full range of tools and mechanisms that the international human rights system has to offer. We welcomed the related activities of UN Special Rapporteurs. We encourages the improved used of the treaty body system to that end, including the recommendation that States should provide more specific information on measures taken in response to the situation of older persons in their reports and that specific recommendations from treaty bodies could address these issues. It was also underlined that much could be gained by the improvement of data collection and the use of disaggregated statistics. Emphasis was also put on the value of regional approaches, and an expert briefed in detail the experiences in the European region.

The European Union was grateful to receive the advance copy of the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of the General Assembly resolution that guides our work. A good number of EU Member States submitted contributions in response to questions formulated by the SG, and we feel that the report provides a very useful update on the diverse national, legal, social and economic situations facing older people between and within Member States. We welcome the description of key challenges, including the feminization of poverty of older persons which, in our view, merits urgent attention and further study, and the summary of the international norms and standards.

The report moreover confirms the complexity and multi-layered nature of the challenges facing older persons in different regions of the world, which do indeed touch on numerous sectors and

policy areas. It gives us an insight into the wide range of national and local measures taken in response to that, ranging from legislation, specific policies, mainstreaming activities and actions at different levels, many of which may still be insufficient. While recognizing the current financial and economic conditions, the report emphasizes the need to give due attention to the subject, to make adequate financial and human resources available, to activate contributions from different stakeholders, including older persons themselves, and to promote a positive image of ageing.

In an initial analysis, we feel that the SG report confirms how much can still be done within the existing legal framework: Much could be gained from the dedicated attention of UN treaty bodies and special procedure mandate holders, from the designation and implementation of better multi-sectoral policies and programmes, in line with the principles of equality and non-discrimination, as well as from technical cooperation and the further exchange of good practice. We also believe that a full and thorough analysis of protection gaps is needed, in order to find the most appropriate tool to fill those. Moreover, we thought that it would be useful if the report could include information about variations in the definition of "older persons", and work needed to develop a definition.

We believe that the working group has much to offer in developing a strategic approach to the global issue of adjusting to an ageing society and its social implications, including joining up strands of work being undertaken in the UN system, for instance:

- The second review and appraisal of the UN Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) in 2012 will certainly present important conclusions and recommendations for improving the protection of the rights of older persons. We recall that that the Madrid Plan of Action incorporated and integrated the improvement of the situation of human rights of older persons in its numerous recommendations for action (*see its paragraph 13*).
- The work of UN regional commissions that assist governments, at their request, in the implementation, follow-up and monitoring at the national level of the Madrid Document.
- We look forward to a panel convened at the 18th session of the Human Rights Council on the right to health and older persons.
- More could be done to explore the strong correlation between disability and ageing: The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities offers protection to a large part of older persons, and it is upon us as State Parties to implement the Convention, taking into account their needs.

In conclusion, may I reiterate the commitment of the EU to actively contribute to the exchanges in this Working Group as it continues to scrutinize international, regional and national standards and policies related to the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by older persons, discusses implementation challenges and tries to identify best practice. As the European Union prepares to make 2012 the "European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations", we hope to find ways to enable older people to contribute to society, to live independently, to stay in the workforce and to share their experience. We must consider how our societies will need to change in order to meet the needs of an ageing population, and we will be happy to report back to this working group.